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SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: SRI LANKAN MEDIA RESPOND TO LTTE  
COUNTERPROPOSALS

1. On 11/1 the LTTE unveiled its long-awaited response to the GSL's Interim Administration proposals (see septel). The LTTE counterproposal elicited immediate and enormous press coverage. Some headlines covered straightforward reportage: "LTTE hands over IA proposals; copies to President and party leaders today," said the independent Sinhala weekender, LANKADEEPA. "LTTE proposes 'Interim Self-Governing Authority' in united Sri Lanka," said the government-owned English weekender, SUNDAY OBSERVER. Other headlines covered more provocative responses, however. "Tigers want lion's share of power," said the independent English weekender, SUNDAY ISLAND. The government-owned Tamil weekender, SUNDAY THINAKARAN, quoted Tamil leader V. Tamilchelvan as saying: "we will not be able to find a solution satisfying chauvinist forces." And the independent English weekender, SUNDAY TIMES, used several bristly headlines: "LTTE seeks sweeping powers," "PA, JVP to plan joint action tonight," "LTTE proposals 'unacceptable': [Rauff] Hakeem," "Swift, angry reaction from JVP," and "Big gap, but government calls for talks."

2. Other headlines:

- DINAMINA (government-owned Sinhala daily): "LTTE proposals handed over to the government; President and other party leaders to be given copies as soon as possible."

- LAKBIMA (independent Sinhala daily): "Unofficial talks on Interim Administration next week" and "LTTE proposals handed over to government through Norwegian Ambassador."

- SILUMINA (government-owned Sinhala weekender): "LTTE says yes to devolution of power within one country-agree to devolve power under the 13th amendment" and "Discrepancies exist: ready to minimize through talks, says ... G. L. Peiris."

- SUNDAY LEADER (independent English weekender): "Government committed to direct talks with LTTE - [G. L.] Peiris."

- SUNDAY THINAKURAL (independent Tamil weekender): "Draft framework different from government proposals," "Tamilchelvan: duty of government and international community act on realities of proposals" and "Tamilchelvan: interim self-government authority will provide environment to solve problems peacefully."

- VIRAKESARI (independent Tamil daily): "LTTE is requesting interim self-government authority," "Tiger proposals differ from government proposals - Peiris," "Tamilchelvan: solution . cannot be found in Sri Lanka constitution," and "draft framework does not address Muslim aspirations - Hakeem."

3. Editorials and op-eds. Five weekenders carried editorials and/or op-ed pieces on the counter proposal. The SUNDAY ISLAND, Sri Lanka's most consistently dyspeptic observer of the peace process, ran an editorial under the headline "The Long Haul" and an op-ed piece provocatively titled "Eelam's soft opening: unveiling the interim administration." The government-owned SUNDAY OBSERVER countered with an editorial under the headline "Re-integration." "Devolution or Eelam" asked the SUNDAY TIMES. An editorial in THINAKURAL called the counterproposal a "door to freedom for Tamil-speaking people" THINAKARAN called the counterproposals a "hopeful start after a long interval." And VIRAKESARI wondered editorially: "What will the Sinhalese ruling majority do?" Excerpts follow:

- SUNDAY ISLAND editorial: "The long haul." "So the LTTE's proposals are finally in and the long haul must now begin reconciling what is possible with what is demanded within a framework of reality.. The Tigers were widely expected to pitch their demands sky high. It's not as bad as the fatalists anticipated but is not a cause for cheering judging by a government statement issued last morning which spoke of the 'disparities of the positions of

the parties' and the admission that the LTTE vision of a framework for a political solution 'differs in fundamental respects' from the government's proposals. It is well within the bounds of probability that the LTTE crafted its present demands using the Chelvanayakam dictum, 'something now, more later.' ... the new Thalaivar in the Wanni is in an entirely different league and playing for massively different stakes. He is backed not only by heavy artillery, battle hardened cadres and all the other appurtenances of a modern army, but also a fanatically motivated corps of suicide killers who have time and again proved their prowess. ... this country obviously cannot return to war and the military option is no option at all. Whatever our politics, that is a reality we must live with and the absolute bottom line. Negotiations therefore must proceed despite the many landmines along the way.... Meanwhile the serious business of reaching the necessary accommodations to begin realizing the full potential of the available international goodwill for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the war devastated areas as well as reviving the national economy must begin."

- SUNDAY ISLAND op-ed: "Eelam's soft opening: unveiling the interim administration." "As we wait for the IA proposals to be unmasked this weekend, and received with predictable ecstasy by the GOSL, let us decode Balasingham. The LTTE's objective is to legalise their rogue occupation of the north and east, clearing the decks for UDI whenever they choose. And Tamilchelvam, to make sure the IA will be an offer the GOSL can't refuse, has made it clear that the IA comes with an ultimatum attached -- accept, or face war and secession."

- SUNDAY OBSERVER editorial: "Re-integration." "The current peace process seems to have reached a certain maturity in that both sides have now presented substantive positions that can be taken up for intensive discussion, clarification, reasoning, bargaining and collective agreement. At last both sides know, at least broadly, what each side wants and is also prepared to acknowledge as the parameters for negotiation. Now, it is to be hoped that both the Government's as well as the LTTE's documents will come to be used as a common basis for reaching agreement. It will necessarily be a slow process in which agreement is reached on the various aspects of the process of political settlement as and when they are taken up for negotiation. That there may be crucial differences between the Government's and LTTE's positions is also very relevant, especially in envisaging the length and complexity of the negotiations that lie ahead. But once the negotiations revive, it is to be hoped that the negotiators from both sides, and mediators, use both sets of proposals as a common resource of ideas from which both sides could take up elements to meet the various needs that must be addressed in a final settlement."

- SUNDAY TIMES editorial: "Devolution or Eelam." "And so, hatched and incubated with much fanfare, we have the LTTE's proposals for a Provincial Self-Administration under their command in Sri Lanka's North and East provinces. The UNF Government leadership could well have been taken aback by these proposals that call for an extra-Constitutional exercise to hand the LTTE virtual self-rule. The Government Spokesman and Chief Negotiator has already conceded that the 'disparities between the positions are evident' and while reiterating a firm commitment to a negotiated settlement, he sees that the shock to an increasingly disturbed South is cushioned.... No doubt these are matters up for negotiation now. It is a well established practice that when going in for negotiations one must ask for the maximum plus plus. So, the Government negotiators will now need more than a cool head and a warm heart. They will need a strong stomach for tough bargaining in the months ahead, quite apart from a need to hone in on their negotiating skills. But if there is one thing that the Government must take the rap for in permitting the LTTE make these grandiose claims, it is that they allowed things to fester during the period of the Ceasefire from February last year uptodate. They allowed banks, courts, taxation, IGPs, Chief Justices as they did the military build-ups, while they ignored the Muslim resentment. Now comes the hard grind to undo all these -- or give in.. The question that would linger nevertheless, is whether the LTTE by accepting devolution has given up its goal of a separate state, or whether this Interim arrangement is simply the stepping stone for that separate state."

THINAKURAL editorial: "Door to freedom for Tamil-speaking people" "The LTTE counterproposal is a door to freedom for the Tamil-speaking people. The LTTE has proclaimed that they are not enemies of democracy, but are engaged in an effort at national peace. The racist opposition and the President should look to the future of this country with vision and far sightedness. The LTTE proposals are not communal in any way. The international community is aware

of the travails of the Northeast. Now the Sinhalese people, too, are aware that the armed struggle that took place was not against their government and its army of aggression."

THINAKARAN editorial: "Hopeful start after a long interval." "After seven months of stalled peace talks, a hopeful new start has begun. The LTTE has presented its counterproposals. A movement, which has conducted a 20-year armed struggle against the government has offered interim administration proposals to relieve the problems of the people in a peaceful manner.... Many quarters have accepted the fact that ... an interim administration in the Northeast with full powers is necessary before a permanent political solution is achieved.... Further, both parties have assured the Muslims that their aspirations will not be discarded.

VIRAKESARI editorial: "What will the Sinhalese ruling majority do?" "The LTTE has handed over their counterproposals. This is an important event not only in the history of the Tamils but in Sri Lankan ethnic history as well.... The Tamils had earlier hoped to settle issues with Sinhalese leaders without exposing the hegemony of the Sinhalese Buddhists. But these counterproposals are powerful enough to expose Sinhalese Buddhist domination.... Many political analysts believe that Sri Lanka's Constitution is bankrupt, and that the LTTE proposals are a formidable challenge.

ENTWISTLE